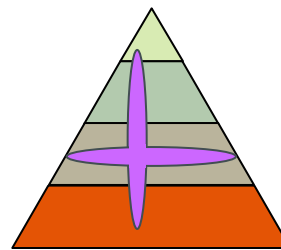




# What is a Learning Community?

- A Learning Community is basically an **action-oriented study group** that focuses on a **subject of deep interest** to its members.
- Typically **informal and voluntary**, groups focus on both individual professional development and solutions to real organizational issues.
- They tend to **cross organizational boundaries**, which gives them a unique perspective for developing knowledge, expertise and business solutions.



*NOTE: A more precise term for learning communities is **Communities of Practice** which reflects their focus on actively engaged learning and practice. The two terms are used interchangeably throughout this text.*



# What do they work on?

- Although communities may have several purposes, one of these is usually the primary focus:
  - **Individual Development:** Pursuing specific development goals
  - **Helping:** Helping members solve everyday problems
  - **Best Practices:** Identifying, verifying and sharing best practices
  - **Knowledge:** Organizing, improving, and publishing knowledge
  - **Innovation:** Fostering new ideas and innovation

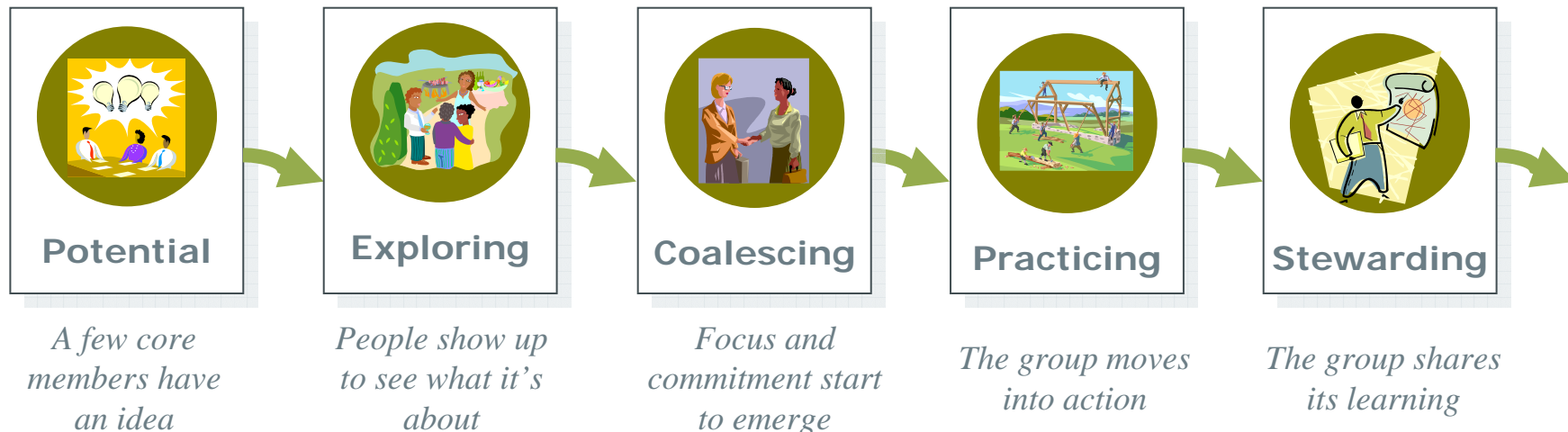
*\*Adapted from “Cultivating Communities of Practice” by Snyder, Wenger, McDermott – p.76*



# Cultivating Learning Communities

- We focus on “cultivating” communities because, at their heart, they are organic and independent -- energized by participant’s interests more than external rewards or formal processes.
  - Their development follows patterns more familiar in a social setting than in the typical business

## Stages in Community Life



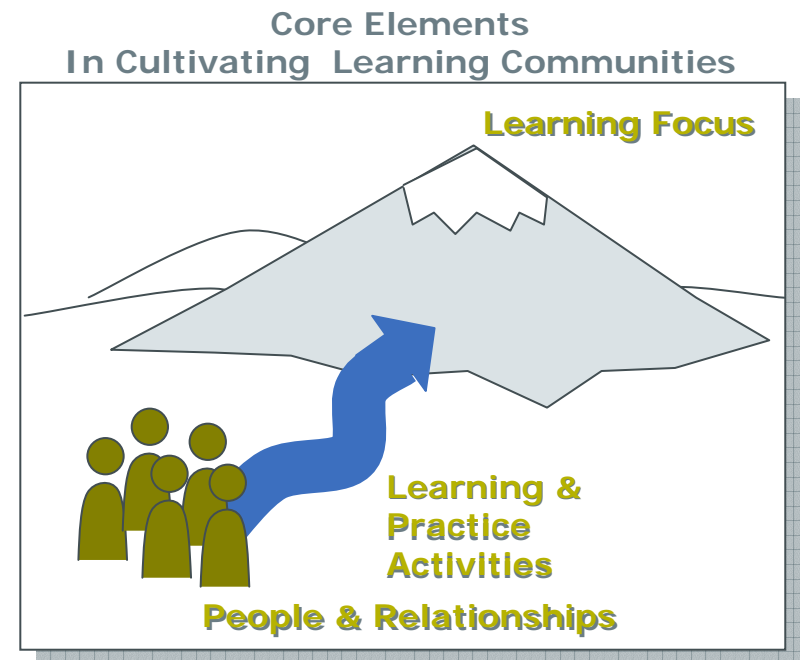


# Cultivating Learning Communities

- Because communities follow different rules, we cannot manage them like workgroups or project teams -- although there are ways to encourage their growth

☞ There are three core elements to focus on over the life of the community

- **Learning Focus:** The subject of interest
- **People & Relationships:** The members and how they interact
- **Learning & Practice Activities:** How the community works together to learn, and the knowledge it creates



*Three aspects of community adapted from “domain”, “community” & “practice” described in “Cultivating Communities of Practice” by Snyder, Wenger, McDermott - pp.27-29*



# Ways to get started

- **Early conversations**
  - Talk to potential core members about what might be possible, what issues they care about, who they would like to see involved, who might benefit. Explain the idea and ask for their involvement.
- **Pre-launch design meeting**
  - Invite the core group to design an exploratory community meeting. Consider whom to invite and how to give a taste of the potential value.
- **Launch meeting**
  - Invite and host potential community members to get to know each other and discover what shared needs, interests, or concerns they have. Put the most energy into creating an hospitable environment and providing a taste of real value.
- **Next steps**
  - Plan to follow up on the exploratory meeting, based on next steps and interest identified there. Create ways for people to re-connect, including events, on-line tools, phone lists, etc. Pursue minimum resources necessary to get started.



## Simple Ways to Start Right Away

- Ask people what they care about
- Share what you care about
- Make invitations and proposals
- Say "yes" and show up
- Tell the story as you go